

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTH #1452/01 2910934
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 170934Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2648
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T ATHENS 001452

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/SE AND PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE: ADVANCING THE U.S. AGENDA ON AFGHANISTAN
AT THE HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION

REF: ATHENS 1383

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Deborah McCarthy for 1.4 (b) and
(d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) The October 23 - 24 meeting of the High Level Consultative Commission (HLCC - a policy-level bilateral on political-military issues mandated by the U.S./Greece treaty that establishes basing rights in Greece) is an important opportunity to advance our agenda on Afghanistan. We recommend a strong push for additional contributions but stress that we can obtain more if we recognize Greece's help to Georgia, its support of multiple U.S. Navy and Air Force operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, and active participation in KFOR. END SUMMARY.

Pushing on Afghanistan

¶2. (S) We have been pressing Greece to make a significant contribution (USD 30 million per year for five years) to support expansion of the Afghan National Army (ANA). The Greeks are seriously reviewing this request (reftel), and are supportive of efforts to broaden NATO's existing ANA Trust Fund. Operationally Greece's contribution in Afghanistan is limited. They currently have about 150 soldiers in ISAF, but with a caveat restricting their deployment to the Kabul region. We have repeatedly pressed the Greeks -- at the most senior levels -- to do more, emphasizing ISAF's urgent need for helicopters and OMLTs. We have, more recently also pressed the Greeks to provide additional funds to sustain the expanded ANA. Greek military officers privately tell us that they believe Greece could do more in Afghanistan but that there are "political level" obstacles to additional contributions. It is important that Deputy Minister of Defense Plakiotakis (who is heading the Greek delegation) hear directly from Washington interlocutors the same things he and his colleagues hear from us in Athens -- Greece needs to do more.

¶3. (S) However, the manner in which this message is conveyed is key to their. Plakiotakis, in particular, is thin-skinned. Although he needs to hear our concerns clearly, he is more likely to be receptive if our message also contains concomitant recognition of Greek contributions.

Greek Contributions and our Mil-to-Mil Relations

14. (S) Although the broader U.S./Greece relationship is not always smooth, the U.S.-Greece military-to-military relationship, is strong, and we believe it pays important strategic dividends. Some of Greece's key current contributions in the military sphere include:

-- Souda Bay: Souda Bay is the U.S. Navy's most important strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean. A large number of U.S. and NATO operations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean depend on this facility in Crete. The Greeks do not place any restrictions on access, overflight, or deployment of even the most sensitive military assets at Souda Bay.

-- Flight Clearances/OEF and OIF Support: Since 9/11, the Greek Ministry of Defense has granted blanket overflight clearances for all U.S. military aircraft that pass through Greek airspace in support of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

--KFOR: Greek military forces are important contributors to maintaining stability in Kosovo with approximately 600 personnel deployed in NATO's KFOR mission.

--OA: Greece is one of the top three contributors to Operation Active Endeavor (OAE) - NATO's Article V counter-terrorist operation in the Mediterranean.

--Ship visits: The GOG has supported fully a robust ship-visit program allowing close to 300 U.S. naval vessels to visit 12 Greek ports over the last two years.

Other Issues

15. (C) Beyond the discussion of Afghanistan, we can also expect the number of key issues to come up, including:

-- Russia/Georgia: The Russia/Georgia crisis put Greece in a tight spot due to its historically close ties to both countries. The GOG supports Sarkozy's efforts, and FM Bakoyannis has said the right things on Georgian territory integrity and the withdrawal of Russian troops. PM Karamanlis has also publicly stated that violence is not the appropriate response and has emphasized "territorial integrity." Greece provided immediate assistance as well as twelve monitors and two vehicles for the EU observer mission in Georgia. Aid pledges total over 750K.

At the same time, Greece has pursued "business as usual" with Russia, with meetings with Russian defense industry officials and Parliamentary ratification in September of the Southstream gas pipeline agreement. The Embassy pushed the GOG hard to cancel or delay these ill-advised moves. It would be useful to ensure that Plakiotakis hears our consistent message to the Karamanlis government that they need to actively support Georgia and avoid business as usual with Russia until Russia meets its international obligations.

-- Greece-Turkey: The Greek/Turkish bilateral relationship has improved in recent years. PM Karamanlis and FM Bakoyannis have made clear that Greece remains supportive of Turkey's EU accession. There has, however, been no tangible progress on long-standing disputes over continental shelf and the status of islands in the Aegean. Also, there is little cooperation on illegal migration and movement of SIAs. The Greeks are pleased with the momentum on Cyprus, sending positive signals about the September 3 start of UN-brokered talks, but they strongly question Ankara's commitment to -- and potential to spoil -- progress on reaching a negotiated solution on Cyprus. They are particularly worried about the TGS playing a spoiler role.

-- Macedonia: We continue to urge both Athens and Skopje to work rapidly for a solution to the name issue, and thus allow Macedonia to receive an invitation to join NATO. UN Mediator

Nimetz recently gave both sides a new set of ideas that purportedly lean towards the Greek position. The Greeks have been circumspect in their reply and have privately signaled that they find much they could work with from the most recent proposal. The Macedonian leadership has highlighted a number of concerns. The U.S. is pressing Skopje to accept this proposal as a basis for further work. Bilateral relations have been further soured recently with a tart exchange of letters between Macedonian PM Gruevski and Greek PM Karamanlis on questions related to the "Macedonian minority" in Greece, by Gruevski raising these concerns in additional letters to world leaders, and by suspicions on both sides about the other's motivations.

-- Aegean Exercises: The Greeks remain focused on working with NATO to craft a future exercise that would include overflight of Agios Efstratios (AE) island, an island whose status as "demilitarized" is disputed between Greece and Turkey; the U.S. has expressed reservations about Turkey's claim of AE's demilitarized status. NATO, however, has followed a firm policy to remain "neutral," which results in a decision not/not to overfly any area under dispute. The Greeks argue that this policy favors Turkish interests.

-- Kosovo: Greece does not appear likely to recognize Kosovo in the immediate future, but is playing a constructive role behind the scenes. Beyond its over 600 forces in KFOR, the Greeks are providing personnel to the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), the OSCE Mission, and the International Civilian Office (ICO) in Kosovo. It has also been among the most active players in the EU in engaging with Serbia post-Kosovo independence and in encouraging Serbia's European and Euro-Atlantic perspective.

SPECKHARD